

## **PRESIDENT'S SMALLPOX PLAN OUTLINED**

By Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample, USA  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 13, 2002 -- Homeland Security Adviser Tom Ridge said today the strategy for the president's smallpox vaccination plan is to immunize frontline troops who serve in high-threat areas and domestic emergency responders.

Ridge spoke at a briefing in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building following President Bush's announcement of his plan to protect Americans in the event of a bio-terrorist attack.

Joining him to help explain the different aspects of the plan were Tommy Thompson, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services; Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Dr. William Winkenwerder, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs; and other top federal health officials.

Ridge said the president's smallpox plan was brought about after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 revealed the nation's need for a better security plan, and brought to light the nation's vulnerability to a terrorist attack.

"Clearly from Day 1, we've been concerned about weapons of mass destruction ... and one of the highest priorities involved smallpox because of its destructive consequences as an agent. It's one of the agents that any country should fear," Ridge said.

Thompson said he is working with state and local governments to draft plans to create smallpox response teams made up of volunteer emergency health and medical personnel. He called the teams critical to the plan to provide critical care and services immediately following a smallpox attack. He said the vaccine and the vaccinations would be made available on a voluntary basis to team members.

"This program centers on these smallpox response teams and first responders for a strategic reason," Thompson said. "Since a smallpox release is possible, we must prepare by offering to those most likely needed to respond. By preparing our emergency responders, we are better able to protect the American people, and this has to our highest priority."

He said the initial stage of the program, which has been in the planning stage for the past year, will not be offered to the general public at this time, even though the United States has enough vaccine to immunize every person in the country. Thompson did say the government would take measures to accommodate citizens who want to have the vaccination done now.

Ridge underscored Bush's comments regarding the existence of an imminent threat of a smallpox attack against the American public. There isn't one, he acknowledged, but the possibilities are real.

"There is no intelligence that talks about an imminent threat of a biological weapon involving smallpox, but because of the nature of that agent and what it could do, we knew we had to come up with a national strategy, a national plan," he said.

In his announcement, the president said a big part of the national plan will include some 500,000 military, who he has ordered to receive mandatory smallpox vaccinations.

Winkenwerder confirmed that the military vaccination program is under way. He told reporters that a "few soldiers" at nearby Walter Reed Army Medical Center had already received the smallpox vaccine. He described the soldiers as members of a military emergency medical team, but declined to identify them or detail the military's plans.